

Urgent post-earthquake needs compound protracted vulnerability in northwest Syria

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POST-EARTHQUAKE HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

In northwest Syria, the earthquakes (6 February) have caused widespread damage, displacement, loss of life, and basic service disruption. According to REACH data collected in the aftermath of the disaster through rapid needs, market, and displacement assessments:

- Communities in earthquake-affected areas most urgently need **winterization, shelter, and multi-purpose cash support**.
- People in the worst-affected areas along the border have been internally displaced both within and out of their communities. Nearly 60,000 displaced people are estimated to be in **newly established displacement sites**.
- A significant portion of earthquake-affected communities (15-28%) reported **disruptions to accessing electricity, water, and health services**.
- Across many earthquake-affected areas, **markets appear resilient** for now, but signs of **supply shortages, price increases, and strained financial services remain a concern** given ongoing access challenges.

MULTIPLE CRISES ARE COMPOUNDING VULNERABILITIES

Any analysis of the scope and severity of needs in northwest Syria must consider the wider context of a **highly vulnerable population prior to the disaster**, due to a variety of compounding shocks:

- **More than a decade of armed conflict.** The ongoing conflict has caused **widespread damage and destruction** of critical civilian infrastructure including health facilities and water services, posing public health risks and triggering **multiple cycles of displacement** as millions of Syrians have sought physical safety and functioning services.
- **Spiraling economic crisis.** Syria has experienced an **economic collapse** since the start of the conflict, made worse following neighbouring Lebanon's 2019 financial crisis and secondary impacts of the war in Ukraine. The crisis has resulted in **soaring food and fuel prices**, amidst **diminished livelihoods** and incomes that cannot keep pace with the cost of living.
- **An ongoing cholera outbreak.** A cholera outbreak was declared in Aleppo governorate in September 2022, which then continued to spread. [According to OCHA](#), "over **2.1 million people in northwest Syria live in the most at-risk subdistricts for developing a cholera outbreak**".

KEY FIGURES

Since the earthquakes:

103,472

IDPs have arrived to host communities and last resort sites.*

91

last resort sites have been newly established.

275,500

people** were estimated to be in need of tents or emergency shelter in the first week.

50%

of interviewed vendors reported shortages of tents in markets and **72%** reported price increases.

59%

of communities reported an increased demand from customers to make purchases on credit.

* Last resort sites include planned and self-settled camps, temporary sites, and reception and collective centres.

** Based on reported number of households and an average household size of 5.5 people.

PUTTING THE CURRENT CRISIS IN CONTEXT

These findings are concerning – not only because they underscore the imminent need for aid to earthquake-affected communities, but also because of the high vulnerability of people residing in northwest Syria prior to the disaster. For example, a reported lack of access to health and water services is particularly troubling given the **ongoing cholera outbreak in the country and generally weakened health infrastructure** due to years of armed conflict. The northwest Syria remains one of the most at-risk areas, and to date, Aleppo and Idlib governorates have [recorded](#) 577 lab-confirmed cholera cases and 23 deaths, with more than 55,000 suspected cases reported.

The country is also facing a **significant economic crisis, due to currency depreciation and rising prices**. The 2019 economic crisis in Lebanon had [significant implications](#) for already-weakened economic conditions inside Syria, coupled with ripple effects from the war in Ukraine over the last year. Syrians have consequently faced an ever worsening depreciation of their own currency, as well as the Lebanese pound and Turkish lira, and soaring prices for food, fuel, and other basic necessities.

Within this context of longstanding economic hardship and recurrent disruptions to market functionality, **REACH analysis found markets to be relatively resilient post-earthquake**. Out of prior necessity, many

markets, vendors, or crisis-affected Syrians more generally should therefore not replace or delay immediate humanitarian assistance.

REACH data indicates that some of the areas most heavily impacted by the earthquakes, such as Harim, Jandaris, and Sheikh Al Hadid sub-districts also **reported little to no availability of basic food items in markets**. Marketplaces and potentially also road networks in these areas are likely to have seen the most damage, reducing the ability to provide food to surrounding communities. Local food production capacity in these areas is also insufficient. Elsewhere, the **primary issue remains affordability**, even when food items are available. [REACH data](#) reiterates an ongoing challenge in Greater Idlib: pre-earthquake, most assessed communities reported that **households could not afford essential food items although markets were present**. The affordability issue is likely to be compounded by decreased availability of credit from vendors as demand rises, and limited access to cash due to financial service providers (FSPs) reporting an inability to meet current demands for cash transfer services.

REACH analysis also found that the primary reported challenge faced when feeding babies and young children under two years in the two months prior to data collection (February 2023) was **the high price of suitable foods such as formula**. Post-earthquake, the Joint Rapid Assessment of Markets (JRAM) also found that 31% of communities reported limited availability of infant formula, further compounding the issue and likely impacting the nutritional intake of infants and young children throughout the winter.

Limited access to livelihoods – already a barrier to covering basic needs pre-earthquake – also signals the **need for immediate**

assistance in order for many households to meet urgent needs now. This is particularly so for Syrians working in agriculture, where inputs might be less available. As [incomes were previously reported to be insufficient to cover the cost of living](#), households were employing coping strategies like purchasing food on credit or borrowed money, relying on less preferred or less expensive foods, and using money that would have been allocated to other needs. Without further assistance, these coping strategies may become overstretched, **leading households to resort to more severe means of coping**.

Assuming or relying upon the resilience of markets, vendors, or crisis-affected Syrians more generally should not replace or delay immediate humanitarian assistance.

vendors have become adept at dealing with sudden damage to shops, supply chain blockages, and price fluctuations. Following the earthquakes, **most communities reported that either all or most vendors in the marketplace were still operating**. Even among communities that did report some degree of shop closures, **the average length of time before reopening was only 2.8 days** – reflecting a remarkable degree of resilience given the level of damage and destruction, but also signalling a lack of viable alternatives for vendors due to the financial ramifications of a prolonged closure. Assuming or relying upon the resilience of

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Post-earthquake findings referenced in this brief are based on data collected through three REACH rapid assessments:

- **Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA):** Data collected 9-11 February. Conducted in partnership with the NWS NGO Forum.
- **Joint Rapid Assessment of Markets (JRAM):** Data collected 14-16 February. Conducted in partnership with the NWS Cash Working Group and NWS NGO Forum.
- **Earthquake Response Displacement Monitoring Assessment:** Data collected 28 February to 4 March. Conducted in partnership with the CCCM Cluster.

The assessments used a key informant (KI) methodology, where one person found to have good knowledge of the situation in their wider community is interviewed to provide information about that location. In sudden onset emergencies, KI data collection methods are often chosen in order to gather basic information about a large area very quickly. However, with a single person responding on behalf of a community, it is important to keep in mind that **all findings and estimated figures are intended to provide an indicative picture of the situation in assessed communities only**. Findings should therefore not be generalised across the population or the region.

More REACH data and analysis on post-earthquake conditions in northwest Syria:

- **[Rapid Displacement Monitoring Assessment factsheet](#):** Provides key figures on displacement flows using data from REACH and CCCM Cluster partners.
- **[Markets and FSL global brief](#):** Provides an integrated analysis of pre-earthquake economic and livelihood conditions alongside findings on market conditions from the JRAM.
- **[JRAM situation overview](#):** In-depth overview of the JRAM findings, providing key data for aid actors developing cash-based programming.
- **[JRAM + RNA Community and sub-district level dashboards](#):** For easier exploration of individual indicators of interest and visualisation of the results at community or sub-district levels.
- **[JRAM dataset](#):** The complete community-level data from the JRAM is publicly available.
- **[Rapid Needs Assessment \(RNA\) situation overview](#):** In-depth overview of the RNA findings, providing key data for coordination and emergency response actors on the ground.
- **[RNA global brief](#):** Provides quick, top-line takeaways from the RNA to summarize the situation two weeks after the 6 February earthquakes.
- **[RNA HTML analysis file](#):** Provides additional analysis of the RNA data, aggregated to the NWS and sub-district levels.
- **[RNA datasets](#):** The complete community-level data from the RNA is publicly available in [English](#) and [Arabic](#).

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).